

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 54
By McLeary

A RESOLUTION to commemorate the life and career of General
Clifton Bledsoe Cates of Tiptonville, 19th
Commandant of the United States Marine Corps.

WHEREAS, from time to time, our nation has given birth to great men whose numerous deeds of valor and honor stand as self-evident, leaving no need for reiteration of the details of their heroic service; and

WHEREAS, in the annals of United States military history, there have been few men of the august stature of General Clifton Bledsoe Cates, who served admirably as the 19th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, a man whose military career in service of the most inviolate principles of freedom and preparedness stand as exemplary testimony to the irrefutable value of the American way of life; and

WHEREAS, a native of Tiptonville, Tennessee, Clifton B. Cates graduated with a law degree from the University of Tennessee in 1916; and

WHEREAS, Clifton B. Cates entered the Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant in 1917 at the beginning of World War I, and during the course of the swiftly-moving two years that followed, the young man from Tiptonville had found his true element and the Marine Corps had found one of its most capable and colorful leaders; and

WHEREAS, immediately upon completion of officer training, Lieutenant Cates found himself commanding troops as a Platoon Leader in the 96th Company, Sixth Marines; his battalion sailed for France in January 1918; and

WHEREAS, after intensive combat training and a short tour in a quiet sector of the front, the Second Army Division, into which the Fourth Marine Brigade had been incorporated, was thrown into the crucial Second Battle of the Marne; Lieutenant Cates was wounded and gassed in his first combat action but refused to be evacuated; and

WHEREAS, at Belleau Wood, Lieutenant Cates led the unit that captured the strategic village of Bouresches and attained command of the 96th Company when all officers senior to him became casualties; this was the first of five occasions that he was to command the 96th Company for this same reason; and

WHEREAS, General Cates holds the singular distinction of being the most decorated Marine Corps officer of World War I, having been awarded the Navy Cross, Distinguished Service Cross with Oak-Leaf Cluster, Silver Star with Oak-Leaf Cluster, and Purple Heart for his meritorious military service; France conferred upon him the Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre with one gilt star and two palms; and

WHEREAS, Lieutenant Cates' Battalion Commander in World War I recommended him for the Medal of Honor; although the Medal of Honor was not granted, the members of the Clifton Cates Memorial Fund Committee are pursuing a posthumous award to General Cates; and

WHEREAS, a career military man whose exemplary service spanned three wars, Lieutenant Colonel Cates was chosen as Commanding Officer, First Marines in May 1942, and shortly thereafter sailed to the Pacific with the First Marine Division in World War II; and

WHEREAS, Colonel Cates' regiment had the distinction of winning the first major engagement on Guadalcanal, a battle in which the regiment annihilated the formidable Ichiki Detachment; and

WHEREAS, on September 16, 1942, he was promoted to Brigadier General and on February 1, 1944, to Major General; and

WHEREAS, in June 1944, Major General Cates returned to the Pacific to assume the post of Commanding General of the Fourth Marine Division near the end of the Saipan operation and commanded the Division in the assault of Tinian and throughout Iwo Jima and for the remainder of World War II; and

WHEREAS, General Cates was one of the few officers of any branch of the United States armed forces to command, under fire, a platoon, a company, a battalion, a regiment, and a division; and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1948, Major General Cates was promoted to General and assumed the prestigious post of Commandant of the Marine Corps, in which office he was destined to have an eventful administration; and

WHEREAS, during his meritorious service as Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Cates played an integral role in rescuing the Corps from relegation to obscurity in post-war reorganization of the armed forces; and

WHEREAS, General Cates' forthright and enlightening testimony before the House Armed Services Committee partially tempered and rechanneled efforts to relegate the Corps to a minor and subsidiary role and paved the way for subsequent passage of Public Law 416, landmark legislation which set the ready combat strength of the Marine Corps at three divisions and three corresponding aircraft wings; and

WHEREAS, when the outbreak of hostilities in Korea faced the Commandant in a crisis of immediate urgency, General Cates, as a result of great organization, efficiency, and alacritous action, was able to send the First Provisional Marine Brigade and its air component to the Far East nine days following the order for its activation; and

WHEREAS, thus, the Marine Corps, under General Cates' sagacious and capable mentorship, did accomplish its mission as the nation's force-in-readiness, and at a time when attrition had seriously sapped its strength; and

WHEREAS, General Cates' administration as Commandant also saw the practical development by the Marine Corps of two important tactical innovations, the helicopter and body armor; and

WHEREAS, during his illustrious military career, he earned three Presidential citations and ten Bronze Stars, while living his life with courage and conviction; and

WHEREAS, General Cates remains the only Tennessean to have ever attained the rank of four-star general; and

WHEREAS, General Cates was born and raised at Cate's Landing in the West Tennessee bayou region of Lake County, and even after a lifetime of exemplary service to his country all over the world, he always considered Lake County to be his home; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of the State of Tennessee, led by the efforts of the General Clifton Cates Memorial Fund Committee, have sought to honor his outstanding career by securing the naming of portions of U.S. Highway 641 and State Route 22 in northwest Tennessee in honor of General Cates through the enactment of Senate Joint Resolutions 152 of 1989 and Senate Joint Resolution 575 of 1990, respectively; naming the newly remodeled National Guard Armory in Tiptonville the "General Clifton B. Cates Armory" through enactment of Chapter 662 of the Public Acts of 1998; having four bronze historical markers placed on his behalf, one on the campus of the University of Tennessee; displaying much of General Cates' battle gear and many of his personal items at the Tennessee State Library; and through many other events; and

WHEREAS, August 31, 2005, will mark what would have been General Cates' 112th birthday, an occasion which should be observed in honor of this valiant Marine of great distinction, courage, and character, whose unremitting service to his country spanned three wars and five decades; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we join with the members of the General Clifton Cates Memorial Fund Committee, all active and retired members of the United States Marine Corps, the citizens of the State of Tennessee, and all proud and patriotic citizens of our republic in honoring the life and distinguished military career of General Clifton Bledsoe Cates on the occasion of the 112th anniversary of his birth.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.